

## Major Street Plan Drives Transportation Planning

Planning for transportation needs is typically one of the most daunting and pressing issues for many cities. The pace and magnitude of growth and development necessitates that a comprehensive, yet flexible, transportation plan be developed, implemented and updated to ensure that communities maintain a safe and efficient transportation network.

Since 1950, Baton Rouge has relied upon the Major Street Plan as the means for identifying and providing for the future transportation needs of the City-Parish. The Major Street Plan identifies new roads and streets, as well as improvements such as street widening or repaving, on the existing transportation network. Also, the Major Street Plan helps direct growth and development within the City-Parish through programming of major transportation routes, and to prioritize projects for future funding and construction. The Major Street Plan serves as an integral part of the planning process.

### History

Following the adoption of the City-Parish Plan of Government in 1947, the first Master Plan for Baton Rouge was prepared. The "Major Streets" section of the Plan was adopted by the Planning Commission in 1950. The two major deficiencies with the street system at that time were the lack of north-south streets and adequate right-of-way on major streets. Except for Airline Highway, no other street had a sufficient amount of right-of-way to serve as a "major street."

The 1950 Major Street Plan was frequently updated by the Planning Commission and served as a foundation for capital improvements. In 1955, the Subdivision Ordinance was extended Parishwide and included the upgrading of street and right-of-way standards. A major implementation of roadway improvements (and drainage) was undertaken through a 1965 bond issue, which included extensive roadway widenings and extensions.

Recognizing the need for continued coordination in planning for transportation and its relationship to other forms of urban development, a Comprehensive Transportation Study for the Baton Rouge area was initiated by the Louisiana Department of Highways, East and West Baton Rouge Parishes, and the cities of Baton Rouge, Baker and Port Allen. This study, conducted in 1967, recommended a "Transportation Plan" to guide the

planning and implementation of transportation system improvements through 1985. The recommended roadway improvements of the plan were developed to accommodate future travel demands, which were based on land use patterns and socio-economic forecasts. A review of the existing transportation network revealed that many of the recommended Transportation Plan improvements have so far not yet been implemented.

Since the development of this Transportation Plan more than 30 years ago, several revisions and updates have occurred which have resulted in what is now the Major Street Plan for the area. A number of the roadway improvements included in the 1967 Transportation Plan are still recognized as needed improvements and are included on the existing Major Street Plan.

The Horizon Plan — adopted in 1992 as the comprehensive land use and development plan for East Baton Rouge Parish — incorporates the Major Street Plan within its Transportation element. The Major Street Plan was amended and updated during the Horizon Plan Five-Year Update in 1997, the Ten-Year Update in 2002, and again in March 2007.

In 2005, with hurricane-induced traffic growth straining the road system to its limits, the City-Parish secured voter approval of an ambitious project to meet current and future traffic needs, while also completing primary components of the Major Street Plan. The Green Light Plan identifies urgent road improvement needs in the City-Parish, and places them on an accelerated timetable by committing resources through the revenue bonding process. This will serve to complete important road improvements in a shorter time, while funding more projects in current dollars. In the next few years Green Light Plan improvements will occur on many of the City-Parish's most congested thoroughfares.

### Relationship of Major Street Plan to the Horizon Plan

The Major Street Plan is a critical component to the long-range planning process. Decisions involving future growth and development patterns are heavily influenced by transportation needs and projections.

Recommendations for roadway improvements or additions need to be consistent with the Horizon Plan. The Horizon Plan identifies areas in





which growth and development are expected to occur. It is important to ensure that the transportation networks can accommodate this growth. Moreover, it is also important that the Major Street Plan is flexible in order to accommodate unforeseen development and to allow for the inclusion or deletion of roadway projects depending upon their urgency and need.

All development, subdivision and site plan applications must be consistent with the Horizon Plan and the Major Street Plan. When applications are submitted to the Planning Commission or the Department of Public Works Inspection Division, provisions must be made for future streets identified on the Major Street Plan. The provisions usually are accomplished through building setback requirements, which ensure unobstructed land for future roadway acquisition and construction.

### Major Street Programming and Funding

Proposed new streets or improvements to existing roads are identified and scheduled in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Scheduled projects are prioritized based upon several factors such as traffic safety and congestion. Urgent projects are given a "Priority I" status and are included in the annual capital budget. Other projects are identified and given either a "Priority II" status, which means that these projects are needed in the near future, or "Priority III" status, which means the projects are desirable and may be included in the CIP if funding permits. The proposals are reviewed annually and the progress of the projects are detailed in quarterly reports submitted by the Department of Public Works.

Road improvement projects are funded through a one-half cent sales and use tax. City-Parish voters approved the rededication of this tax in May of 1997, and again in 2002. In 2005, voters approved an extension of the sales tax through the year 2030 with 70 percent of the funds dedicated to street and roadway improvements. Approximately 50 percent of the anticipated future tax revenues will be bonded by the City-Parish to accelerate completion of the Green Light Plan and other needed road projects.

### Street Standards

Street standards provide general design criteria for the various types of roadways throughout the Parish. In 1997, as a part of the Horizon Plan Five-Year Update, the Metropolitan Council adopted new street standards for the Major Street Plan. The standards were amended to reflect types of roadway construction and design currently in use. In March 2007, the

standards were again amended to incorporate road design types included in the Green Light Plan. The current Major Street Plan standards are:

- 7 Lane — 200' R/W (Right-of-Way) Curb and Gutter
- 6D (Divided) Lane — 200' R/W
- 6D Lane — 150' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 5 Lane — 125' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 4D Lane — 150' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 4D Lane — 125' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 4D Lane — 100' R/W (Existing)
- 4 Lane — 100' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 4 Lane — 80' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 3 Lane — 60' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 3 Lane — 80' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 2 Lane — 80' R/W
- 2D Lane — 60' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 2 Lane — 60' R/W Curb and Gutter
- 2 Lane — 45' R/W Curb and Gutter

### Updating the Major Street Plan

As a part of the Horizon Plan, the Major Street Plan must be a flexible document that can adapt to the constantly changing conditions and demographics of East Baton Rouge Parish.

The Planning Commission Staff, in cooperation with the Capital Region Planning Commission and the Department of Public Works, recommend regular revisions to the plan, which are presented at public hearings and adopted by the Metropolitan Council. These amendments may include the programming of new roadways, changes to rights-of-way, recognition of completed projects, and revisions to street standards.

Also, residents and developers may request amendments and alternatives to the Major Street Plan. Amendments to the Street Plan shall follow the schedule of rezoning applications set in the Unified Development Code (UDC). The Metropolitan Council may consider amending the plan after receiving a recommendation from the Planning Commission.

The Major Street Plan is a legal document that shows conceptual, rather than precise, roadway alignments. The ultimate alignment of streets sometimes varies from the plan. The location of streets is frequently determined by the land acquisition process and the available rights-of-way. The plan, however, guides the Parish in meeting future transportation needs and directing growth and development.

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